

LOS ANGELES – Representative Xavier Becerra (CA – 30) led Hector Barreto, head of the Small Business Administration (SBA), on a tour of small businesses in and around the 31st Congressional District on Thursday, November 15th. The purpose of the tour was to demonstrate the need for economic development in different areas of Los Angeles, particularly among micro-enterprises, and to explore what benefits certain SBA programs can contribute to Los Angeles small business owners.

“In a time where the government’s rhetoric is focused on economic stimulus, it is of paramount importance that we do not forget about small businesses and small business owners,” Becerra said. “This tour is meant to not only highlight the ways a small business can enrich a community, but to also show how government can provide needed and necessary services to these businesses who really are the driving forces of our economy.”

The tour began in Eagle Rock where Rep. Becerra and Administrator Barreto visited Fatty’s Café, a car body shop turned successful coffee house. Rep. Becerra brought the administrator to the café to show him an example of a small business that finds success in a small community and ends up being one of the anchors to a community’s renaissance. Eagle Rock has gained recent notoriety as a community that is on the upswing of success and Fatty’s has been noted as one of the places of business that has added to the community’s growth and prosperity.

“Fatty’s is a perfect example of how a small business has the power to electrify the community,” Becerra said.

After Fatty’s, the tour headed to Lincoln Heights where it visited the Bromack Company, which produces customized aviation casework for the airline industry. Since September 11th, the Bromack Company has had to lay off half of its staff due to an overwhelming decrease in orders. Bromack President Brown McPherson has never experienced such a slide in business. “In 20 years in this business, I have never seen such a dramatic and immediate downturn,” McPherson said. “It has been like running off a cliff. The effects of September 11th are not only felt in our company, they also have a direct and immediate impact on our many vendors.”

McPherson is looking to take advantage of the different programs that the SBA has to offer and thus, was appreciative of the visit. “Congressman Becerra and Administrator

Barreto demonstrated a unique and insightful understanding of the problems that have hit our company,” McPherson said. “Their visit provided a great deal of moral support for all of us. I am confident that with their assistance, we will be able to make through these very tough times.”

Rep. Becerra and Administrator Barreto were impressed with the Bromack Company and were quick to talk to McPherson about the possible ways the SBA would be able to help the company get through this tough time. “I look at Bromack and see a company that has suffered a tremendous loss as a direct result of what happened on September 11th,” Becerra said. “There is no better organization to help Bromack keep producing its fine products than the SBA.”

Following the Bromack visit, the tour continued on to the Rose Eye Clinic, also in Lincoln Heights, where Teresa Duarte and Alice Corona are hoping to build a multi-family entertainment complex. The two entrepreneurs had a chance to discuss their business plan with the congressman and the administrator after taking them on a tour of the facility.

The tour’s last stop was the Mercado La Paloma, where a variety of micro-enterprises and community-based organizations are located all under one roof, but has had trouble getting off the ground since it opened for business in February 2001. Once at Mercado, the congressman and the administrator met with numerous small business owners to discuss what needs to be done to generate business.

“The problem with Mercado is that no one knows that it exists,” Becerra said. “If it could market itself better to not just the surrounding community, but indeed to all of Los Angeles, I believe it could generate the necessary foot traffic needed for it to take off.”

Administrator Barreto enjoyed the tour and made it a point to communicate to all the owners how important their jobs and their companies are. “Small business has always been the locomotive driving the American economy,” Barreto said. “We have 25 million small businesses in the United States and we need to make sure they stay healthy and prosperous.”